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THE SACRED STONE

BY

T. F. G. DEXTER, Ph.D., B.A., B.Sc.

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THE SACRED STONE

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T. F. G. DEXTER, Ph.D., B.A., B.Sc.

“ Some things are remarkable and curious for their elegance . . . some others for . . . their remote Antiquity. If the Reader is of that turn to be delighted only with the former kind of Monuments, I can promise him but little pleasure in the ensuing Treatise, but if he has a just regard for the first ages and customs of mankind . . . he may not lose his labour wholly, nor miss of entertainment.”

DR. BORLASE in “ Antiquities of Cornwall ” (1754).

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EPITOME

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THE SACRED STONE

1. In "Civilisation in Britain 2000 B.C." we stated that those mysterious "Easterners" who came here at some time in the second Millennium before Christ were devotees of a heliolithic cult, or in other words, were sun and stone worshippers. Stone-worship appears to be older than sun-worship, and so will be taken first.

2. Megaliths or great stones are generally considered to have had something to do with stone-worship, and megaliths may be roughly divided into Menhirs, Cromlechs and Circles. Cromlechs seem to have been designed mainly as "houses" for the dead, and will be considered when we deal with the Cult of the Dead, while Stone Circles were *places* rather than objects of worship. So we have left for consideration only the Menhirs or Long Stones. (Fig. 1.) Some of these are memorial stones (Fig. 2), comparable with our modern tomb-stone: others seem directly connected with the cult of stones, and will form the chief subject of this booklet.

3. Long, long ago, stones were alive. They spoke and delivered judgments, distinguishing the rightful king from the usurper, the honest man from the thief. They made men, strong and true; women, loving and fruitful. Once upon a time stones behaved just like mortals; they ate; walked down to the nearest river to drink; grew tall and strong; they even reproduced their kind! Now they do none of these things; they are inert, lifeless, dead; indeed "stone dead" has passed into a proverb.

4. But I can hear the sceptic saying: "Stones never were alive, they never moved about, they never ate and drank like ordinary mortals. It's all unmitigated nonsense."

No, it is not. Our universe, that is the world outside us, is what we make it. To the happy, generously-minded man, this is the best of all possible worlds: to the mean,

spiteful grumbler, it is the very worst world that could possibly have been devised! The dog smells things, hears things, sees things which we never smell, hear or see. His universe is in several ways unlike our own. Similarly, man of long, long ago, had a universe somewhat different from ours to-day. *To him stones were living things.*

5. Man's former belief in the living stone still survives in folk-lore, and we will now give a few examples of the folk memory of moving stones.

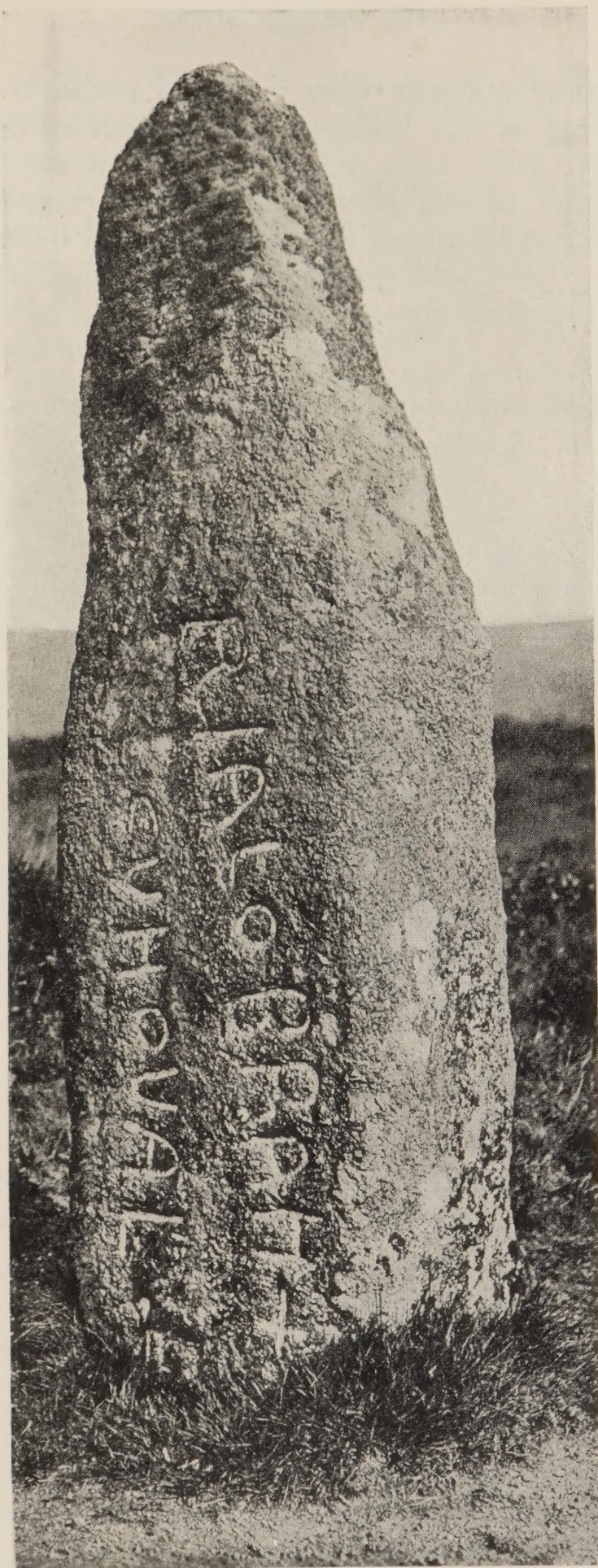


Fig. 1.

A MENHIR OR LONG STONE.

6. The Oxfordshire yokel tells the stranger that the Banbury Stone goes down to the Avon to drink every time it hears a church clock strike twelve. If the stranger looks puzzled, the yokel will sagely add: "Of course it does, every time it *hears* the church clock strike." But this is merely a modern gloss upon the erst-time belief that the Banbury Stone actually had the power of motion.

The menhirs of Plouhenik in Brittany every New Year's Eve go and wash themselves in the Intel River, and a myth still survives in Oxfordshire that once a year certain stones



Photo]

[H. W. Hughes.

Fig. 2.—THE MEN SCRYFA,
the finest Memorial Stone of ancient date in Cornwall.

(Fig. 3) become maidens who visit and bathe in an adjacent stream. Hunt, in his "Popular Romances of the West of England" (p. 187), says there was once a rock near Looe Harbour which turned round three times whenever a cock crew in a certain farmyard near at hand, and he adds, "many a time have I been told that certain stones had been removed by day, but that they always returned by night to their original positions."

7. Caillie tells us that near an African village called



Fig. 3.

THE KING'S STONE, ROLLRIGHT STONES.

N'pal there is a sacred stone which leaves its place and moves thrice around the village as a warning of impending danger.

8. The belief in the moving stone seems to have died hard. In the Parish Register of St. Mary's, Reading, is found the following notice dated 26th July, 1602: "This child was killed by a blocke which fell upon him; which blocke was founde by the Corowner's Jury to be guilty of his death."

9. Stones could not only move about at will, they had on occasion the power of prophetic speech, and a few of the many instances will now be given.

10. In Gairloch, Ross-shire, "future events in reference

especially to 'lyfe and death' " were as late as the middle of the seventeenth century foretold by performing certain ceremonies at a hallowed stone.

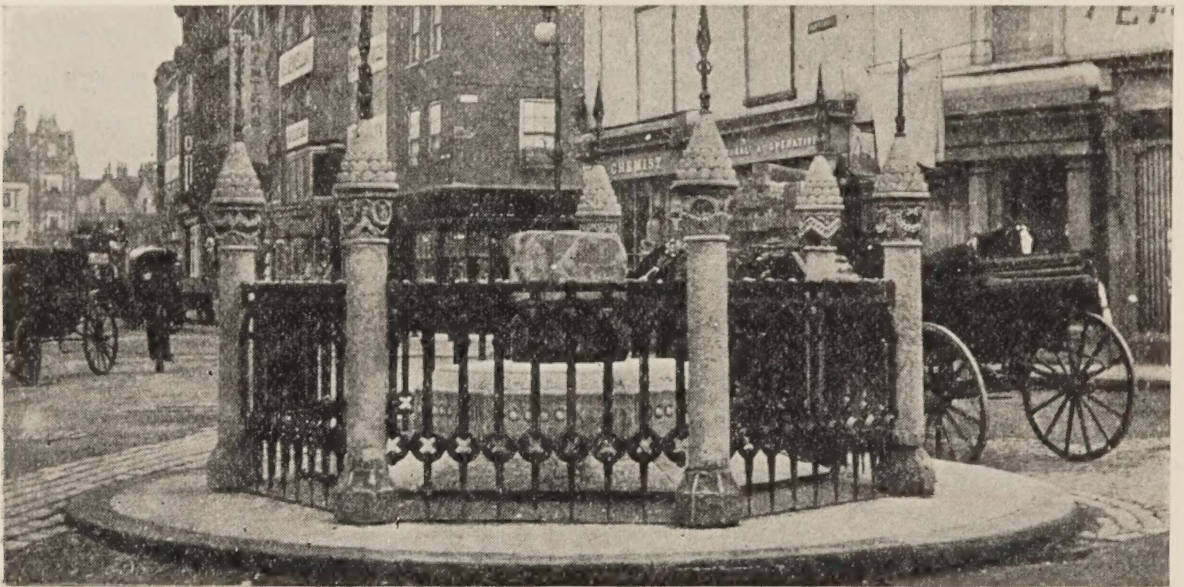
Conor Mac Nessa, an Irish legendary hero, consulted an oracular stone at Clogher, County Tyrone, and the stone gave such good advice that he thereby acquired the sovereignty of Ulster. Sir W. R. Wilde in his "Lough Corrib" narrates that the *Leach-na-Fechin*, "Fechin's Stone," near the Lough, was an oval-shaped flagstone, and anyone accused of crime, underwent voluntarily or involuntarily, the ordeal of turning the stone with certain rites and incantations, in accordance with instructions given by the guardian of the stone. This stone was evidently oracular, and the "guardian of the stone" seems to be the representative of the heathen priest who once presided over the sacred stone. Near the river Tay in Waterford is a rock called *Clog Lowrish*, "Speaking Stone," which, according to tradition, was an oracular stone in pagan times, but which has never spoken since a wicked woman perjured herself before it.

11. The Lechlavar, "Speaking Stone," near St. David's, is mentioned by Giraldus Cambrensis. Hunt says that between St. Ives and Zennor in Cornwall there once stood a Logan Stone which when rocked made "a noise which could be heard for miles," while a pile of weathered rocks called *Cairn Kenidjack* or *Kenidzhek*, and thought to mean "Hooting Cairn," is known in St. Just-in-Penwith to-day.

12. But the most famous speaking stone of Celtic lands was the Lia Fail, which roared when Conn, the Hundred fighter, trod on it, thus proclaiming him King of all Ireland. This stone is supposed by some (but not perhaps the best authorities), to have been taken to Scone, a former capital of Scotland, whence it was removed by Edward I. to London, and it is now believed to be under the Coronation Chair at Westminster Abbey. Conn was a Goidel, and whoever sat upon the stone was proclaimed as a rightful king of the Goidels, provided the stone screamed when he sat upon it. The Stuarts are believed to be descended from the Goidels, and the fact that James, a Stuart (the sixth of Scotland and the first of England), was crowned King in the Coronation Chair at Westminster Abbey is supposed in some mysterious way to be due to the influence of this wondrous stone.

The Coronation Stone at Kingston on Thames (Fig. 4), at which several Saxon kings were crowned, is a stone exactly comparable to the Lia Fail, and it may be that a folk memory of the choosing of kings at certain stones prompted Jack Cade to proclaim himself "lord of the city" from London Stone. (Figs. 5, 6.)

13. Blocc and Bluigne were two flagstones at Tara, and the man who aspired to the kingship had to ride his chariot between them. "When they accepted him, they would open before him to let his chariot pass through." Saxo Grammaticus, the old Danish historian, says that "the ancients, when they



Photo]

Fig. 4.

[W. Dexter

THE CORONATION STONE, KINGSTON-ON-THAMES.

were to choose a king, were wont to stand on stones planted in the ground and to proclaim their votes, in order to foreshadow from the steadfastness of the stones that the deed would be lasting."

14. Stones being alive, like all living things, wanted nourishment, and so in Fiji and elsewhere we find food offered to stones. Coming nearer home, at Altagore, Co. Antrim, a stone called "The Old Woman" used to be fed with oatmeal cakes and butter, which were said to be duly taken away by the *Grogan* or fairy, apparently the modern representative of the spirit or deity of the stone. Sven Nilsson relates that in Scandinavia down to the end of the eighteenth century round

THE SACRED STONE

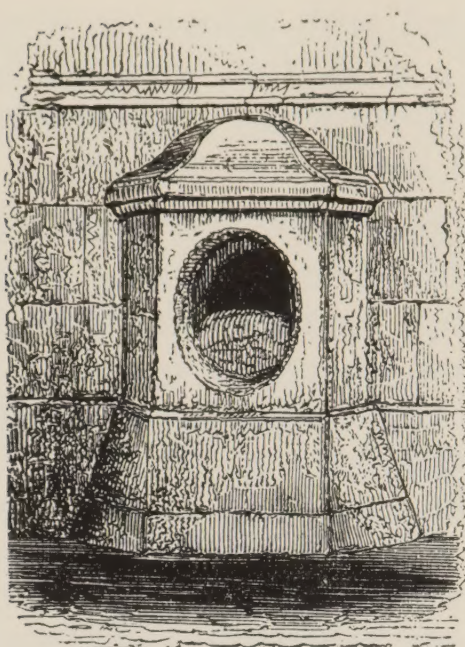
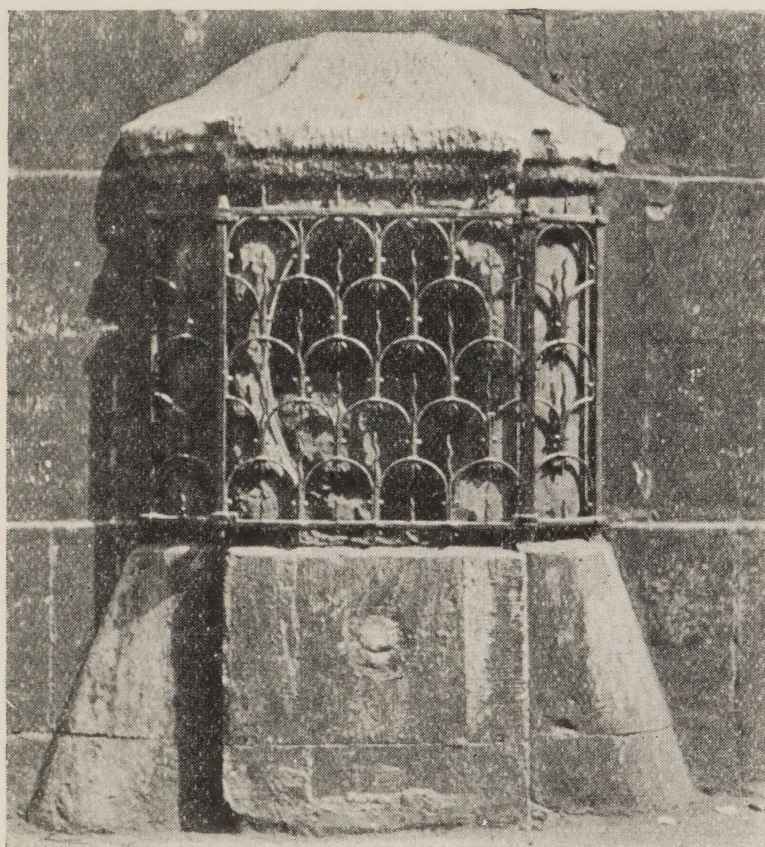


Fig. 5.

LONDON STONE

Before the erection of the Grille. From an old woodcut.



Photo]

[W. Dexter.

Fig. 6.

LONDON STONE.

Present day.

stones were smeared with butter or steeped in ale to bring luck to the house ; while the Reverend S. Baring Gould tells us that in remote localities in Brittany the peasants still daub certain stones with honey, wax and oil.

15. This feeding of stones may perchance account for the Cup Markings on rocks—standing puzzles to the antiquary. Sometimes these cup markings are traditionally reputed to be the marks of giants' fingers or of saints' footsteps. Thus in Bellanascadden in County Galway, there is a "Giant's finger-stone," and in Sheestown in Ossory, a rock called *Gisceam Padruig*, "Patrick's footsteps." We may safely dismiss the saints as the cause of the markings, but the association of giants with these hollows points to their heathen origin.

At the ancient sanctuaries of Gezer and Taanach in Palestine have been discovered standing stones with holes cut in them, presumably for the anointing of the stones, and for the reception of offerings of oil and blood. Nearer home, we find Montelius, the Swedish archæologist, asserting that libations were in his time still secretly poured into cup-stones in Sweden.

16. Having obtained this information we will come back to these Islands. Mr. R. N. Worth says that "there was found in 1879 at Lew Trenchard, Devonshire, . . . a menhir which had long laid buried . . . on the worked top of which a little hollow had been sunk. Such hollows had been observed on the tops of menhirs in Brittany, but until this discovery at Lew Trenchard, it had been thought that they were simply holes made to receive the shafts of . . . small crosses . . . to Christianise them. No such use, however, could be ascribed to this hole in the Lew Trenchard stone, and the reasonable supposition now is that these holes were in existence before the Christian era, in which case they must have had some connection with the practice of anointing and lustration."

17. That this supposition may well be correct is shown by the following instances. J. G. Campbell, in his "Superstitions of the Highlands" (pp. 184, 186), relates that milk used to be poured into the hollow of a stone believed to be inhabited by a fairy called Gruagach, in order that the cows might yield a good supply of milk ; further that hallowed stones on which these libations were once poured were still

to be seen as late as 1900 at several places in Skye. We have likewise a record that a milk offering was once poured daily into the cup of a stone called *Clach-na-Gruagach*, "Stone of the Long-haired One," in Gairloch, Ross-shire. In Cornwall there is a parallel to the Gruagach Stones—"the Three Brothers of Grugith" (Fig. 7) in St. Keverne, which have nine cup-markings apparently intended for libations.

18. Closely associated with these cup-markings are larger depressions called rock basins, and Mr. Robert Hunt, a learned geologist and a Fellow of the Royal Society, says: "Dr. Borlase has been laughed at for finding rock basins, the work of Druids, in every granitic mass. . . . But there are

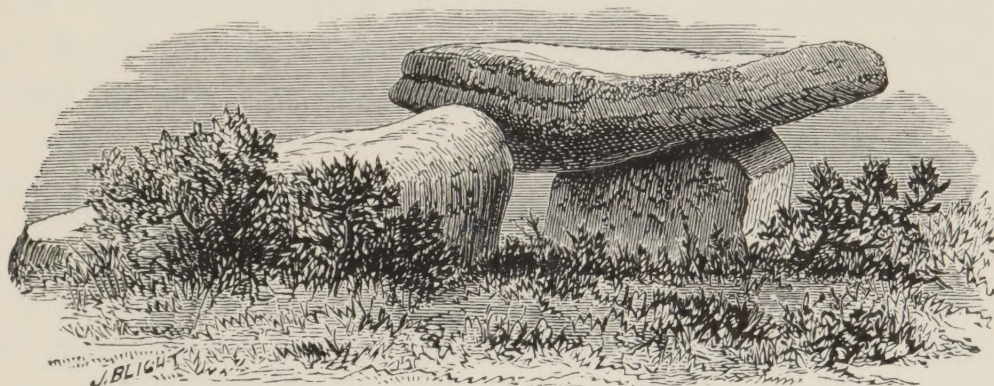


Fig. 7.

THE THREE BROTHERS OF GRUGITH, CORNWALL.

From a sketch made about 1870.

numerous hollows to be found in large flat rocks which have unmistakably been formed, if not entirely, partly by the hands of man. The Sacrificing Rock on Carn Brea is a remarkable example." Some of these hollows closely resemble in shape the Indian Yoni, undoubtedly the work of man. More and more we are coming to the conclusion that there was a diffusion of culture from Eastern to Western lands, and there is perchance more truth in the opinions of Dr. Borlase and Mr. Hunt than some archæologists suppose.

19. The taking of food is connected with nutrition and growth, and hence perhaps the idea that stones grow. The belief in the growth of stones is by no means yet dead in England as the following anecdote quoted by Mr. W. Johnson in his "Folk Memory" (p. 131) shows. A clergyman trying to convince a bucolic parishioner that stones did not grow, said: "If you put a stone on that mantelpiece and look at

it in five years' time, you will find it has not grown." Slowly came the response: "Noa, and I hreckon if you put a 'tater there it would not grow, either!"

20. Stones were not only alive and grew, but they were connected with the production of life. Thus Ovid and others tell us that Ducalion and Pyrrha after the Deluge created mankind afresh out of stones. The members of the Arab clan of *Beni Saber*, "Sons of the Rock," claim that their ancestors came from a rock still to be seen in Moab. Pliny states that according to Theophrastus and Mucianus, stones generated other stones. Democritus, amongst the ancients, and Savonarola and Carden, in more recent times, are reputed to have believed in the reproductive power of stones. Indeed, the belief is not dead yet, for in some parts of England masses of conglomerate or pudding stone are still known as breeding stones.

21. There is no doubt whatever that primitive man thought stones were endowed with life. Our examination of folk and other lore connected with stones compels us to this conclusion. But *why* did ancient man think stones were living things? Aye, there's the rub. We shall never probably be able to give an absolutely correct answer. To do so we should have to live the life of primitive man, do his deeds, hope his hopes, think his thoughts, dream his dreams—manifest impossibilities to-day. But two authorities, Sir E. B. Tylor and Professor G. Elliot Smith essay answers, both unlike, and yet both apparently possible.

22. Sir E. B. Tylor is the Apostle of Animism, and Animism or Spiritism may be roughly defined as the bestowal of an *anima*, a soul or spirit, upon all objects. Animism seems to be a constituent of most primitive religions. However ignorant primitive man might have been of the real nature of death, he knew the difference between a dead body and a living one. He knew that he was alive and that someone else, say, his father, was dead. When his father died, a "something" (his *anima*, life, spirit, soul) left him. Thus he came to the conclusion that a living man, as contrasted with a dead one, had a "soul." Therefore he, being alive, had a "soul," and the members of his own family and tribe, who were also alive, likewise had "souls." The animals he domesticated,

those he hunted were alive; they too had "souls." Trees and plants grew and died, just like himself. They were alive and had "souls." The wind blew; it moved; it had a "soul." The spring bubbled up, the river flowed to the sea. Their motion made them alive—with "souls." His arrow flew, like a bird, through the air. His arrow had a "soul." The moon waxed and waned, the sun moved through the sky, the stars changed their positions. The heavens as well as the earth teemed with life and "souls." Even stones had "souls" and were, he believed, living things.

23. It is interesting to note that Animism still lives in the life and thought of civilised man. The poet's "Personification" is nothing more than a refined form of Animism. "The savage invests everything with personality and life, and what is poetry to us is philosophy to him." The sailor calls his ship "she," and speaks of the ship's vagaries and moods as though it were a living thing. The boy's top is "asleep" when it is spinning and "dead" when it stops, while the girl's doll is a "real, live baby."

24. Professor G. Elliot Smith, with a mental freshness and originality of outlook not too often found among anthropologists, hazards another solution of the enigma. He points out that the ancient Egyptians at first buried their dead in the sand, and that the hot sand mummified the flesh. Later on, when stone coffins were used, it was observed that the flesh disappeared, and this flesh was supposed to be consumed by the stone. Hence the term *sarcophagus*, "the flesh-eating thing," from the Greek, σάρξ (*sarx*), "flesh," and φαγεῖν (*phagein*), "to eat." Pliny notes this, for he states that near Assos in Troas was found a stone "by which all bodies are consumed; it is," he says, "called Sarcophagus." He further states: "It is a well-known fact, that dead bodies, when buried in this stone are consumed." Stone was evidently thought to absorb the man, "body, soul and spirit": it received life and hence became endowed with life.

25. The same idea exists out of Egypt. Thus in the Scotch tale of "The Young King of Easaidh Ruadh," a giant states that his life was in an adjoining cairn, and the Dyaks of Borneo believe that the souls of dead ancestors sometimes reside in certain stones to which they sacrifice.

26. So it will not surprise us to find human beings metamorphosed into stone. The megaliths at Stonehenge are petrified giants (Fig. 8); Stanton Drew (Fig. 9) is a wedding party turned to stone. Cornwall presents us with the "Hurlers" (Fig. 10), men transformed into stone for playing a Cornish ball game known as "Hurling" on a Sunday; also with the "Merry Maidens" (Fig. 19), who suffered a similar fate for dancing on the Lord's Day. But these scraps of Cornish folk-lore are late. It was not till the advent of the Puritan that



Photo]

Fig. 8.

[W. Dexter.

STONEHENGE.

cir. 1900 A.D.

it became wicked to dance or play games on a Sunday. The metamorphosis of human beings into stone is explicable by one of the theories just given (§§ 22-24), but the belief may have taken its rise in the likeness some stones have to the human form.

27. Living, moving, speaking, eating, growing, procreating stones are foreign to the thought of to-day, but the practice of giving especial solemnity to an oath by swearing upon a stone is a thing we can readily understand. The stone is immutable, immovable, everlasting, and would of course impart similar qualities to the oath sworn upon it. In old documents we find records of oaths sworn upon stones. Thus we read that in 1438 "John off Erwyne and Will Barnardson swor on the Hirdmane Stein before oure Lorde ye Erle off Orknay and the Gentiless off the Cuntre."

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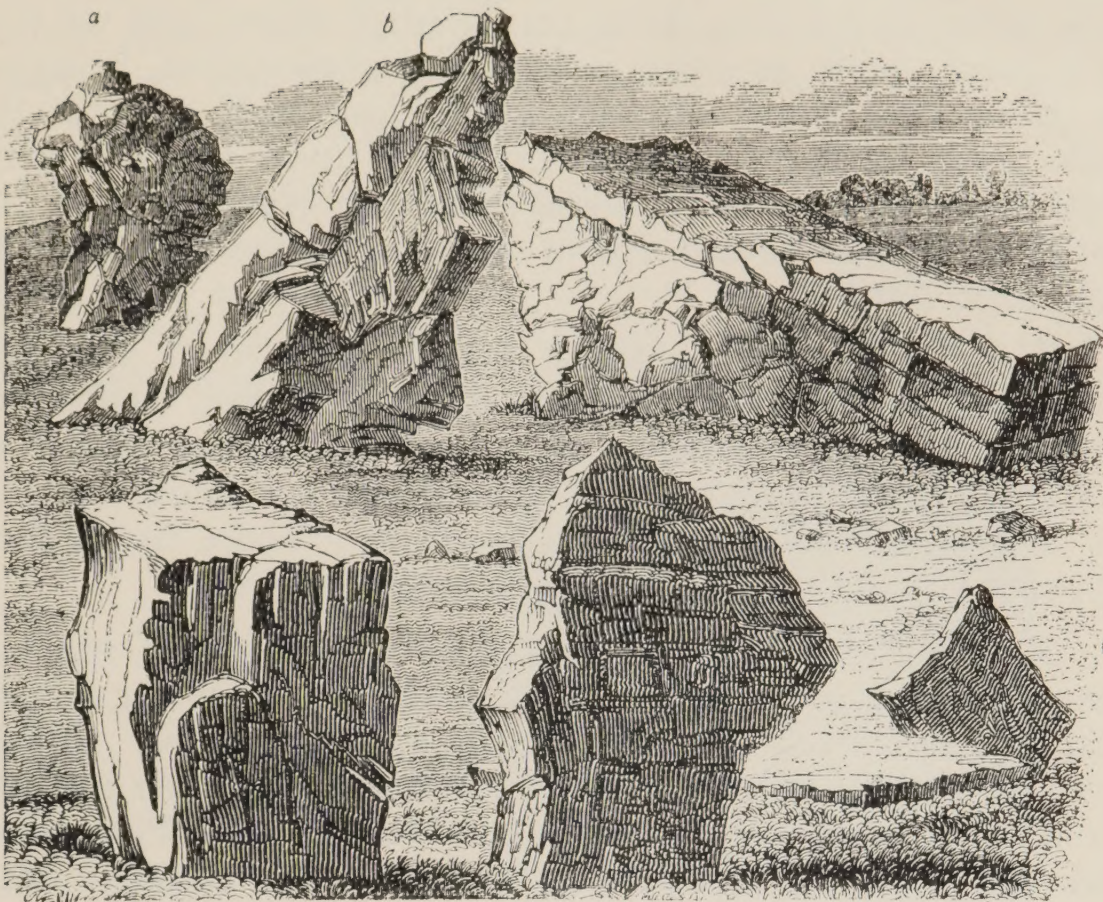


Fig. 9.
STANTON DREW.
From an old woodcut.



Fig. 10.
THE HURLERS, CORNWALL.
(Drawn by John Norden shortly before 1584.)

28. Oaths sworn on heathen stones were sometimes held to be more sacred than those on Christian altars, and we find the Church, with its usual policy of incorporation, bringing the pagan oath stone into the sacred fane itself. Hence the black stone formerly in Iona Cathedral upon which solemn oaths were once sworn: hence also the blue stone in the chapel of Fladda Chuan Island and the sacred stone of St. Molling in Arran.

29. The healing power of stones seems to us a strange belief, but not, however, strange to ancient man. He knew what we are just beginning to learn—the healing power of sunlight, and in his mind (for what reason we know not) the sun was closely connected with the stone: hence the healing properties of the sun became transferred to stone.

30. Many instances of this close connection of sun and stone will occur in the course of the development of our subject. Here it will be necessary to give only a few examples. Bryant says that the Scholiast on Pindar informs us that the sun was of old called a stone, and according to Herodian, the Phœnicians made an image of the sun of a black stone. Pausanius states that at Megara was a pyramidal stone called Apollo Carinus. Apollo was a sun-god—yet one more conjunction of the sun and the stone. Yet again, in Melanesia sunshine is produced by smearing a sacred stone with red earth. Egyptologists seem to take the conjunction of sun and stone as granted, and so we find Sir E. A. Wallis Budge speaking of short pyramids as “sun-stones.”

31. And now we are in a position to proceed to the healing powers of stone. There are definite records of stones which cured madness, lameness, flux, measles, while some seem to have been mediæval pharmacopœiæ, and to have cured nearly every human ill.

32. Healing stones, according to Wood-Martin, were sometimes known as “Doctor Stones.” He states that close to St. Conall’s Well near Donegal Bay, there is a stone about the size and shape of an ordinary dumb-bell, known as St. Conall’s stone (Fig. 11), and believed to be efficacious in cases of sickness. When a person is ill the stone is taken to the house and kept there till a cure is effected. A stone of the same size and shape as St. Conall’s Stone has been found at Breage in

Cornwall (Fig. 12), and may well have been a healing stone. Similar dumb-bell shaped stones with miraculous healing powers are met with at Toomoor in County Sligo, and at Relig near Bruckless in Donegal.

33. Geoffrey of Monmouth (Chap. VIII.) also refers to healing stones, for he makes Merlin say of certain mystical stones on a mountain called Killaraus in Ireland, that "the giants of old brought them from the farthest coast of Africa, and placed them in Ireland, while they inhabited that country.



Fig. 11.
ST. CONALL'S
HEALING STONE.



Fig. 12.
STONE FOUND AT BREAGE, CORNWALL.
Perhaps a healing stone.

Their design in this was to make baths in them when they should be taken with any illness. For their method was to wash the stones and put their sick into the water, which infallibly cured them. With the like success they cured wounds also, adding only the application of some herbs. There is not a stone there that has not some healing virtue." Geoffrey also tells us that Merlin, by his secret art, moved the stones from Ireland to the "mount of Ambrius," perhaps Amesbury in Wiltshire, near which, as we have seen, are the remains of what was once the greatest megalithic monument in the British Isles. Further, there is little doubt that in all this myth there

is some historic truth. The "giants" who brought the stones from "the farthest coast of Africa" seem to have been those mysterious non-Aryans whom we have called "Easterners," Egyptians, etc., and it may be noted that "the farthest coast of Africa" was in Geoffrey's time the Red Sea coast, and not the Cape of Good Hope as it is to-day. That these mysterious peoples were not aborigines is indicated by Geoffrey's statement that they "placed" or built these megaliths "*while they inhabited*" Ireland. The moving of the stones from Ireland to the mount of Ambrius is a mythical way of stating that the same race built both the Irish and the English megalithic monuments. Or, it may be a reference to the moving of the Pembroke Stones to Stonehenge (Fig. 13), for Pembroke, like Ireland, is west of Stonehenge.

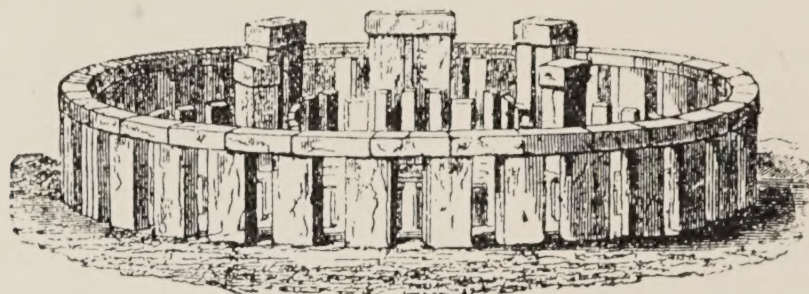
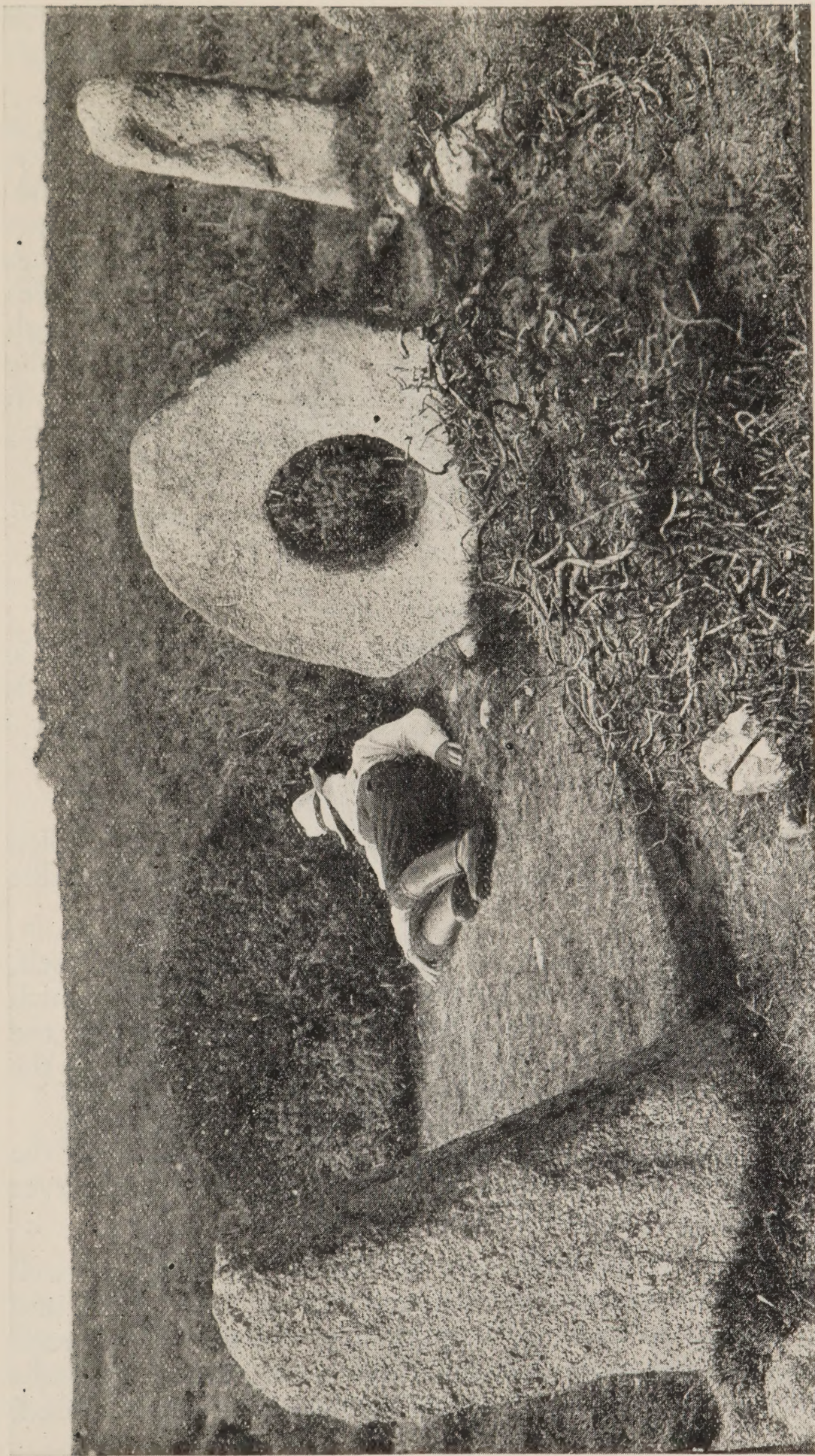


Fig. 13.

STONEHENGE RESTORED.

35. The more we discover about the ancient inhabitants of these Islands, the more history and the less myth we find in the pages of Geoffrey of Monmouth. Hitherto we have been too ignorant to appreciate Geoffrey as a historian.

36. But the healing stone of healing stones was the Holed Stone, and children used to be passed through holed stones for the cure of infantile complaints. St. Cubert's Holy Well is along the Cornish coast a few miles north of the spot where I am now writing. Near it is a cleft in the rock, and an old man once told me that as a lad he saw children passed through this cleft as a cure for rickets. But *the* Cornish cure for rickets was passing the child through the *Men-an-Tol*, "Stone with the Hole," near Penzance (Fig. 14). The *Cloghafoyle*, "Stone of the Hole," in Aghade, Co. Carlow, Ireland, was used for a similar purpose. *Shargar* means "sickly child," and at Fyvie, Aberdeenshire, is the Shargar Stone with a hole in it, through which mothers passed their weakly children.



[H. W. Hughes.]

Fig. 14.

MEN-AN-TOL, NEAR PENZANCE.

Photo]

37. In his "Monuments de Pierre Brute," Reinach remarks: "The greatest curers are the holed stones through which are passed the diseased limb or the sick person. . . . Into a natural hole in a great block of stone at Kerangelet, in Goueson, are inserted the limbs afflicted with any infirmity, and the same ceremony is practised at Drache in Indre-Loire. In the forest of Fouvent-le-Bas mothers push new-born infants through the pierced rock. . . . The church even sometimes becomes the theatre for the operation: thus in the Landes there are openings in the pillars of certain chapels through which mothers pass their children. Mahe has seen in the crypt of the church at Quimperle a vertical stone, pierced with a circular hole, through which people passed to cure headache;

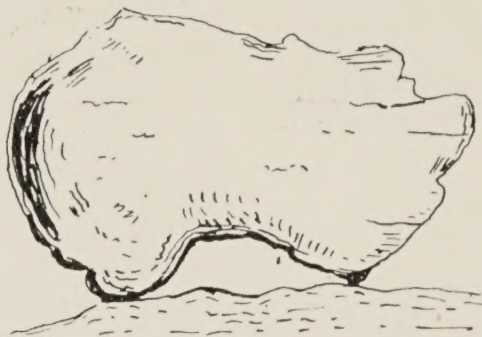


Fig. 15.

CLOCH-NAVE-DEGLANE, IRELAND.

and near Chartres, in a church called the Madeleine, is a holed stone through which women pass their children's feet to enable them to walk."

38. When there was no hole in the sacred stone itself, a passage under the stone between it and the rock on which it rested was utilised. Perhaps the best examples are the Cloch-Nave-Deglane at Ardmore in Ireland (Fig. 15), and the Men-an-tol at Constantine, Cornwall (Fig. 21).

39. Forbes Leslie remarks on the prevalence of the custom of crawling through stones in Ireland, and observes that the practice is found all over the world.

40. The world-wide cult of the holed stone is well brought out by Conder in Chapter VII. of his "Heth and Moab," and as an aside we may say that the cult of the rude stone is as world-wide as that of the holed stone. In India (*the* land of the stone-cult) stone-worship is widely diffused,

especially among the aboriginal tribes, and an unshapely stone coloured with vermillion is held in high veneration. (Fig. 16.)

41. Stones which were curing stones had holes sufficiently large for the passage of a child or for the insertion of the limb



Fig. 16.
SACRED STONES, INDIA.

of an adult: sometimes indeed large enough for the passage of the whole body. Another kind of holed stone had merely a small hole, sometimes large enough for the insertion of a

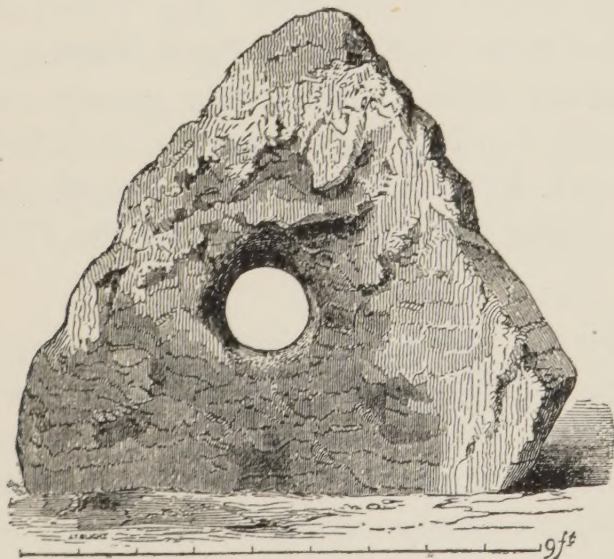


Fig. 17.
TOLVEN (HOLED STONE),
CONSTANTINE, CORNWALL.

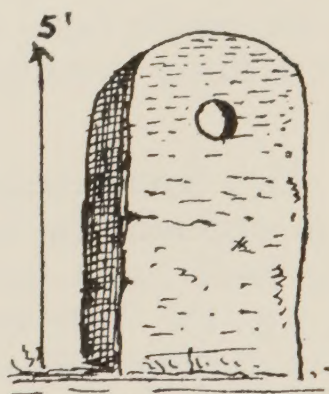


Fig. 18.
HOLED STONE, CORNWALL.
(Sketched by Dr. Borlase *cir.* 1750.)

hand (Fig. 17), sometimes so small as to admit only a finger (Fig. 18). Compacts were ratified by clasping hands through a hole in a stone at Kilchouslan, Kintyre, and through one at Stennis, near Kirkwall, Orkney.

42. The persistence of the belief that an oath on a heathen holed stone was particularly binding is shown by the following anecdote told in 1781 by Gordon in his "Journey to the Orkney Islands." "A young man was called before the sessions, and the elders were particularly severe. Being asked by the minister the cause of so much severity, they answered, 'You must know what a bad man this is; he has broken the promise of Odin,' and further explained that the contracting parties had joined hands through the hole in the stone."

43. Near the old parish church of Lairg in Sutherland, Scotland, was once a stone called the "Plighting Stone"—known far and wide as a medium (one might almost say as a sacred medium) for the making of bargains. . . . By grasping hands through this stone, the parties to an agreement of any kind bound themselves with an inviolability of a solemn oath. Several holed stones used for a like purpose are to be found in Ireland. Thus a holed stone at Castle Dermot, Co. Kildare, is known as the "Swearing Stone," while at Doagh, Co. Antrim, is a stone with a hole large enough to admit the hand, and it is said that betrothals are ratified by the couples clasping hands through the hole.

44. Some connect the holed stone with the Yoni, with the heathen doctrine of the new birth, and with Phallicism. Certainly a discerning observer who looks at the group called the Men-an-Tol (Fig. 14) finds himself forced to the conclusion that the whole thing may once have had a phallic significance; indeed, stone worship is by some regarded as part of the Phallic Cult.

45. Some circles have an outer menhir, or "pointer" (often opposite the entrance to the circle), and sometimes the circle itself has a female name, while the pointer has a male one, *e.g.*, the "Merry Maidens" and the "Pipers" at Bolleit, Cornwall (Fig. 19). Again, so many upright menhirs, even after ages of denudation, bear such a striking resemblance to the *membrum virile*, that one is forced to admit that there may be something in the Phallic Theory after all.

46. A few more apparent instances of the connection of the stone with Phallicism will now be given. One of the stones at Plouarzel in Brittany has on each side of it a round boss about a foot in diameter, and about three feet above the

ground (Fig. 20). Against these bosses, husband and wife rub themselves; the man hoping he may be the father of boys only, the woman that she may rule her husband. Some cromlechs in Ireland are known as "Diarmaid and Grainne's Beds," and being supposed to be the places in which these

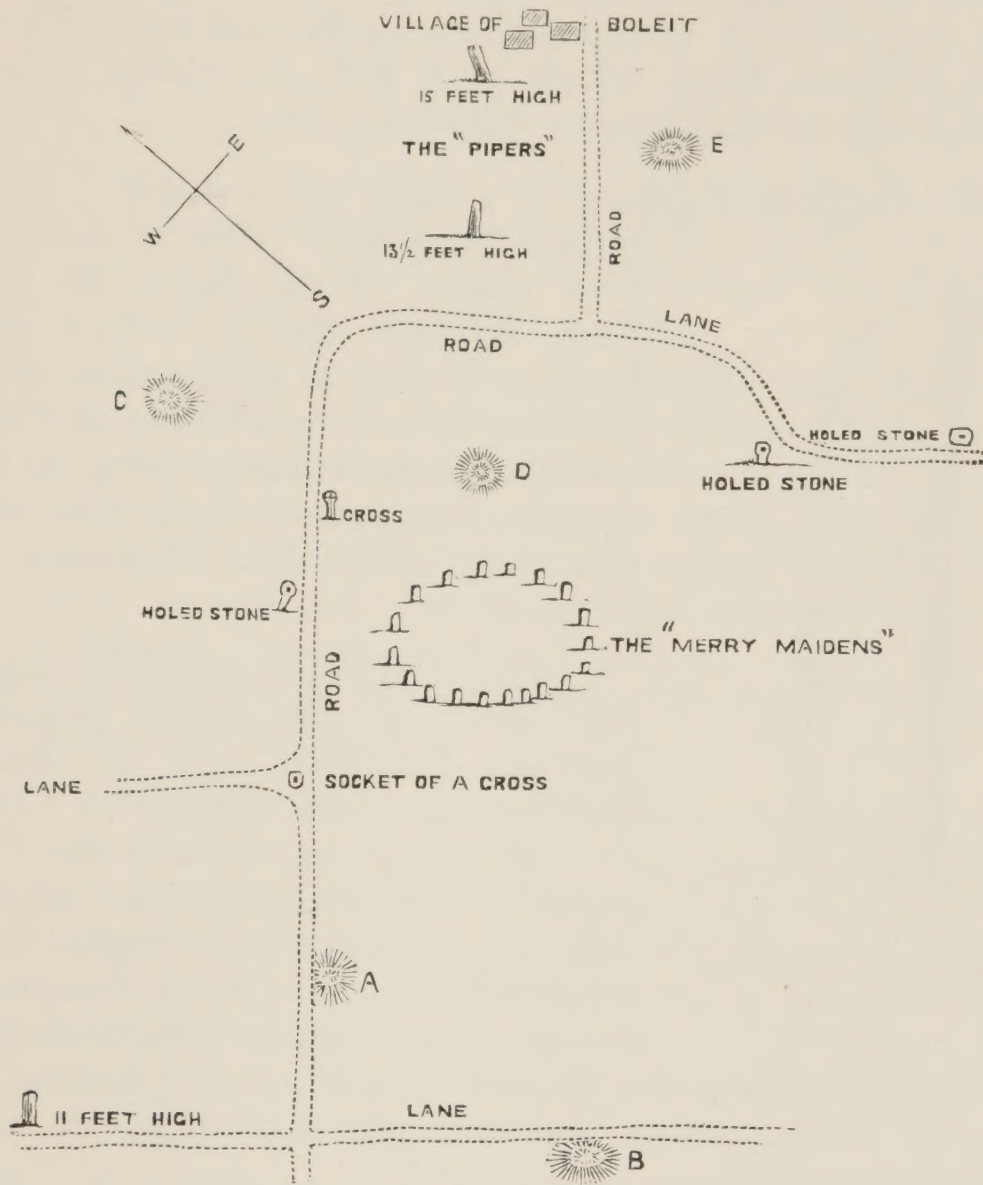


Fig. 19.

THE MERRY MAIDENS AND THE PIPERS, CORNWALL.

eloping lovers embraced, they are visited by women who wish to become mothers. At Innismurray, off the coast of Sligo, there are two holed stones called "Praying Stones," before which expectant mothers offer up prayers for safe delivery. In this connection it may be noted that legend narrates that a wondrous stone assisted St. Nonna when she gave birth to St. David.

47. Mr. McPherson, in an address before the British Association in 1928, asserted that contact with a "Stone of Virtue," such as the one in Brahan Wood near Dingwall, was once thought to induce pregnancy in barren women. He also instanced the stone called Clack-na-Bhan in Glenavon, which found a husband for the single woman, and ensured her an easy delivery after marriage—a stone comparable with one in Brittany down which girls slide to obtain a lover; married women for safety in a critical period.

48. In Ireland gallaun is a name for a menhir, and *gall* means "phallus." One of the names, *Ferp Cluche*, of the Stone of Fal at Tara, suggests that it was a phallic fetish. As late as 1872 a stone at Tara was known as the Phallus of Fergus, and the reason will be evident to those who know the stone, and who at the same time are students of ancient Irish literature.

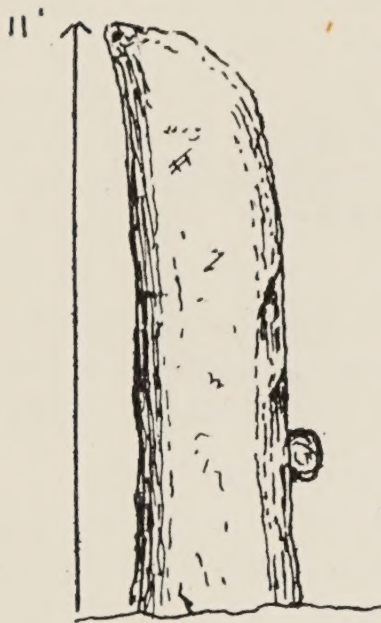


Fig. 20
STONE AT PLOUARZEL,
BRITTANY.

49. Philology seems to support the idea of the close connection between Phallicism and the Cult of the Stones. *Men* (maen) in Cornish is "stone"; hence *men-hir*, "long stone." *Men* also signifies "phallus." *Min* was an Egyptian Ithyphallic god, equivalent to the Classic Priapus. It is of course quite unorthodox, but one begins to wonder if *men* (stone), *men* (phallus), *Min* (Egyptian phallic deity), and *men* (plural of man) are not all from the same root.

50. Some stones had magical properties, an indication of their erst-time religious character, for Magic and Primitive Religion are intimately connected. Lord Roden, in 1851, stated that in the Island of Inniskea, is a stone called Neevougi, to which the natives pray in time of sickness. When a storm arises the stone is supplicated to send a wreck upon their coasts. An old woman directs the ceremonials connected with this stone—an interesting example of the survival down to the middle of the nineteenth century of a priestess officiating at a

sacred stone. According to Martin Martin, a seventeenth century writer, the clan Chattan kept a similar stone in the Isle of Arran.

51. Morris in his "Celtic Researches" mentions a *Maen Glaw*, "Rain Stone," "which," he asserts, "they rolled about when they wanted rain," a stone exactly comparable with the Lapis Manalis, kept outside the walls of Rome and dragged into the city in times of drought in order to procure rain. Martin Martin says that Fladda Chuan Island, off the west coast of Scotland, has a chapel with "an altar in the east end, and therein a blue stone of a round form on it, which is always moist," and that to procure a favourable wind, fishermen used to wash the stone.

52. According to the same authority, the Macintoshes of the Isle of Arran had the privilege of guarding the Baul Mulay, a green stone shaped like a goose egg, "The virtue of it is to remove stitches, and to swear upon; the credulous firmly believe that if this stone be cast among the front of an enemy, they would run away." Which reminds us of the *Clach-na-Bratach*, "Stone of the Standard," which gave the Scotch their victory at Bannockburn—but a flaw found in it led to the rout at Sheriffmuir.

53. Other wondrous stones are the proud possession of some South Australian tribes and are known as "emu's eyes," which prevent the emus when pursued from running away! But the most wondrous of all these wondrous stones was "the Stone of Gwyddon Ganhebon upon which all the arts and sciences in the world are engraven." Needless to say it was "one of the three primary and extraordinary works of the Isle of Britain."

54. This account of the Sacred Stone would be incomplete without a reference to Stone Idols.

Idols were anointed with oil, and Arnobius, a Christian convert, speaking of his heathen days, says: "Whenever I espied an anointed stone, greasy with oil, I used to adore it, *as if there were some indwelling power in it*. I flattered it, I spoke to it, I demanded benefits from the senseless block."

55. The members of a tribe in the Hindu-Kush say of a stone they worship: "This stands for God, but we know not his shape." The god thus resided in the stone. The stone

itself was not worshipped, but the divinity which dwelt in it. By an easy transference of thought known as the mistaking of means for ends, the stone which contained the deity came at last to be regarded as a deity itself. It was possible for even a god to mistake a stone for a god, for Hesiod narrates that Cronos devoured a stone in the belief that it was his son Zeus.

56. Continuing our record of Stone Idols we may note that Pausanias narrates that in the market place of Pharae in Achaia were 30 square stones, and to each was given the name of a god. The Greeks and the Romans worshipped upright stones under the names of Hermes or Mercury. The Thespians had a rude stone which they worshipped as a god, a form in which the Boetians revered Hercules; while the Phœnicians worshipped a god under the form of an unshapen stone.

57. We have many references to idols in Celtic lands. In Gaelic some menhirs are called *Clach Sleuchdadh*, "Stones of Worship," appellations apparently derived from heathen times. St. Patrick, in his "Confession," says that some of the Irish up to his time "had worshipped only idols and abominations," and from other sources we learn who some of these idols were. Thus the "Book of Leinster" and the "Tripartite Life of Patrick" tell us of an idol called Cromm Cruach, a pillar stone covered with gold and silver, which once stood in *Magh Slecht*, the "Plain of Prostrations" in Co. Cavan. Around it were twelve attendant idols—pillar stones covered with bronze. Cromm Cruach, according to the "Book of Leinster," was the chief idol of Erin, and in the "Rennes Dinnsenchus" we read that "until Patrick's advent, he was the god of every folk that colonised Ireland." D'Arbois de Jubainville translates Cromm Cruach as "Bloody Crescent," and the epithet, "bloody," is probably an allusion to the human sacrifices offered to this idol. In Connaught there was an idol called *Cromm Dubh*, "Black Crescent," and the anniversary of its destruction (the first Sunday in August) is still known as *Domnach Cruimm Duibh*, "Cromm Dubh's Sunday." The idol of Ulster was called *Kermend Kelstach*, and was still standing in the porch of the Cathedral of Clogher in the days of Cathal Maguire, who died in 1498. In the Brehon Laws a boundary stone is called *Lia Adrada*, "Stone of Worship," comparable with the Roman Terminus, the god of boundary marks.

58. The biographer of St. Samson gives us a probable glimpse of stone worship in Cornwall in the sixth century. As the Abbé Duine says, the Latin of the Saint's Life is very barbarous, and so Canon T. Taylor quotes two variant readings suggested by the Rev. F. W. Paul. Adopting these, we learn that as St. Samson was journeying through the hundred of Trigg in Cornwall, "he saw men worshipping a certain phallus after the custom of the Bacchantes by means of a lewd play." The Saint remonstrated with the idolaters, who pleaded "that there was no harm in their commemorating their parents' wedlock in a play." By means of a miracle the idolaters were converted to Christianity, and as a proof of their sincerity, they destroyed the idol. We are further told that the Saint carved a cross on a standing stone hard by. Unfortunately, there is no indication of the material of which the idol was made, but in all probability it was a menhir carved to represent a phallus.

59. We have, however, probable indications of stone idols in Cornwall and elsewhere much later than the time of St. Samson. Dr. W. Borlase, in his "Antiquities of Cornwall," published in 1754 (pp. 156, 166 ff), gives especial attention to three remarkable rock masses in the village of Men, in the Parish of Constantine, Cornwall. As ~~all~~^{two} of them have now unfortunately disappeared, the Doctor's accounts are especially valuable. He says that the Men-an-Tol, or Holed Stone (Fig. 21), in this parish is "the most astonishing monument of its kind," and he proceeds to describe it as "one vast oval Peble, placed on the points of two natural Rocks, so that a man may creep under the great one and between its supporters through a passage about three feet wide and as much high." The greatest length of the stone was 33 feet, and its greatest circumference about 97 feet, while he calculated that the weight was at least 750 tons. He says that the top was honeycombed with "Basons," which seemed to discharge into two principal ones. While admitting that "the Antients . . . in these rude works spared no labour to accomplish their design," yet he continues—"notwithstanding all this I have some doubts whether this stone was ever moved since it was first formed." This extraordinary stone was blasted in 1869!

The Doctor also records a stone "like the Greek letter Omega, somewhat resembling a cap." It was 11 feet high,

and 30 feet in girth (Fig. 22). He considers this a stone deity. ~~Unfortunately, like the stone just mentioned, it has been~~

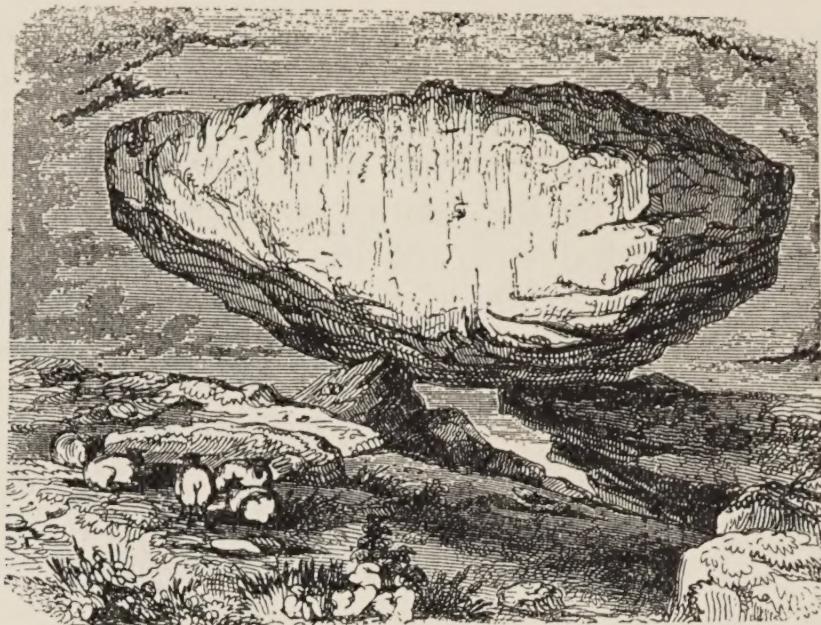


Fig. 21.

MEN-AN-TOL, CONSTANTINE, CORNWALL.

Now destroyed.

(Drawn by Dr. Borlase, *cir.* 1750.)

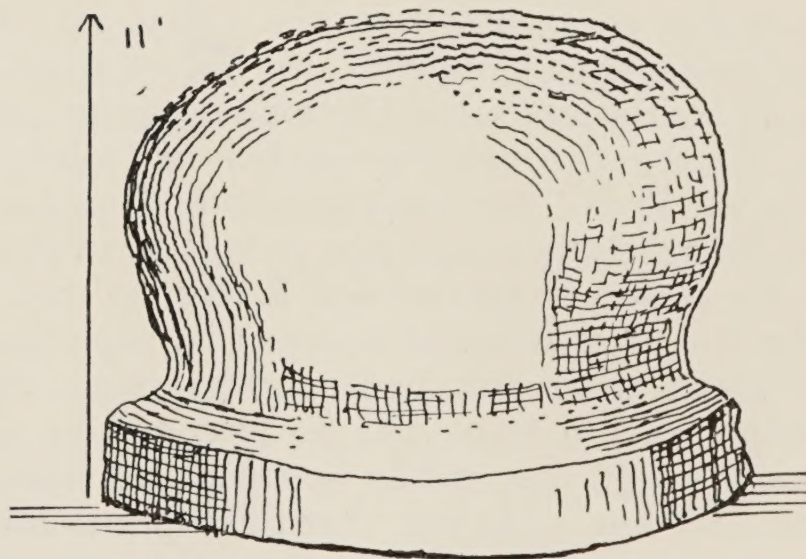


Fig. 22.

THE "OMEGA STONE," CONSTANTINE, CORNWALL.

Probably a Stone Idol. ~~Now destroyed.~~

(Drawn by Dr. Borlase, *cir.* 1750.)

~~destroyed.~~ Lastly, in a village called Men-Perhen, in the same parish, Dr. Borlase tells us that in 1754, "there stood, about five years since, a large pyramidal stone, twenty feet above the

ground and four feet in the ground: it made about twenty stone posts for gates when it was clove up by the farmer who gave me this account."



Fig. 23.

THE CHEESEWRING, CORNWALL.

(Drawn by Dr. Borlase, *cir.* 1750, and valuable because at that time there were no concrete supports.)



Fig. 24.

ENCIRCLED ROCK AT TRESCAW, SCILLY.

Probably a pagan sacred stone.

(From a sketch by Dr. Borlase, *cir.* 1750.)

In south-east Cornwall the Doctor notes the Cheesewring (Fig. 23) which he calls the Wringchease. Although he considers it a natural formation, yet he thinks that "we may truly reckon it among the Rock-deities." He also records several "Rock-deities" in the Isles of Scilly (Fig. 24).

60. With regard to the doubts of Dr. Borlase and others regarding the transport of huge stone blocks in Cornwall and elsewhere, the problem becomes much simplified if we admit the possibility of Egyptian presence and influence. The Egyptians were mighty movers of great blocks of stone. Erman says: "No Egyptologist now doubts that all these marvels of stone moving were worked by *one* power alone, viz.: by the reckless expenditure of human labour." Thus we have an account of the transport of stone in the reign of Rameses IV. (c. 1172 B.C.), in which the work was carried out by 5,000 common soldiers, 200 "officers of the troop of the fishers of the court," 800 men of the barbarian mercenaries, and 2,000 bondservants of the temple—8,000 in all.



Fig. 25.

KARN MENEZES RING AND ROCK, WENDRON, CORNWALL.

Now destroyed. (Drawn by Dr. Borlase, *cir.* 1750.)

61. Returning to our subject, pagan stone idols, we may note that *La Gran'mère du Chimquière*, "The Grandmother of the Churchyard," is a rude carving of a female figure found in the Churchyard of St. Martin-de-la-Beilleuse, Guernsey, and once much revered by the people. Not so long ago it was thought lucky to make small offerings to this stone, and old men remember the times when it was "feared more than it is now." A somewhat similar stone has been found in the chancel of the parish church of Ste. Marie-du-Castel, also in Guernsey. Some encircled stones in Cornwall seem to have been stone idols, and the Carnmenellis stone (Fig. 25) seems reminiscent of the Egyptian Tet (Fig. 26), a subject which must be reserved for a subsequent occasion.

62. The following is inserted to give a little relaxation

in a somewhat dreary enumeration. "According to the very legendary life of S. Maurilius (not given by the Bollandists), there was a rock in the diocese of Angers around which the natives assembled once a year for a grand dance and merry-making." That the stone was heathen and sacred is shown by the fact that in answer to the prayer of the Saint "the place stank so abominably" that the peasants had to abandon their festival!

63. Lastly, we would quote what is probably the latest reference to stone-idols and stone-worship. The Rev. J. M. Pearson, in a paper read in 1928 before the Anthropological Section of the British Association, states that the megaliths of Aberdeenshire were believed till recent times to be the abodes of spirits or demons. He quotes a record to the effect that in 1649 a man was brought before the Kirk Session of Elgin charged with idolatry in setting up a stone and using superstitious ceremonies, such as taking off his "bonat" to it. Indeed he quotes a record of stone-worship 200 years later, *i.e.*, within living memory. His authority is Bishop Chisholm, who states that a farmer of Glenlivet, Banffshire, placed upright stones on his farm and recited "certain words" before them.

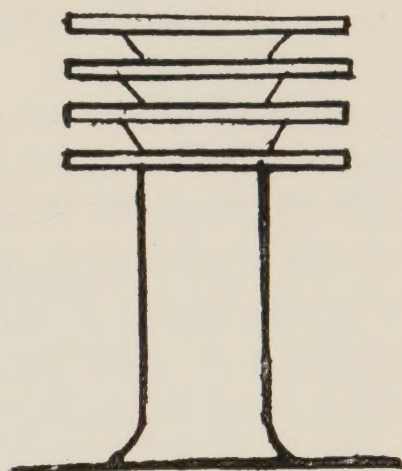


Fig. 26.
THE EGYPTIAN "TET."
A sacred symbol.

64. Both Church and State endeavoured to suppress stone-worship. The Councils of Arles (A.D. 452) and of Tours (A.D. 567) condemned the cult of stones. The Council of Nantes (A.D. 658) ordered "Bishops and their servants to dig up, remove and hide" heathen stones. Charlemagne in A.D. 789 endeavoured to suppress the cult and to destroy the stones themselves, while Edgar the Peaceable forbade stone-worship, and Canute made it illegal.

65. But the Christian Church and State combined did not entirely succeed in suppressing stone-worship. Mohammedanism endeavoured to abolish the cult of stones, with like ill-success. Clement of Alexandria, a second century writer, states that the Arabs once worshipped stones, and even to-day

under monotheistic Islamism, the Black Stone of Mecca occupies the honoured place at the shrine of Mohammedanism. Hebraism had also to compromise on the question, as Professor Robertson Smith in his "Religion of the Semites" (p. 186) clearly shows.

66. So the Church adopted its usual policy—that of incorporation, and it wisely endeavoured to regulate what it could not prevent. St. Samson, as we have already learned, Christianised with the sign of the Cross—not the Phallus, which was too gross, but a stone hard by, probably not so coarse, but which may be surmised to have been a heathen sacred stone. Some of the monoliths with inscribed crosses in Cornwall and elsewhere may well have been heathen sacred stones Christianised. A Welsh proverb, "*Da yw'r maen gyda'r Efengyl*," "Good is the stone together with the Gospel," seems to enshrine the memory of the coalescence of Christianity with pagan stone-worship.

67. In "Ogygia" III., 293, we read that "St. Patrick . . . in the plains of Moy-slola . . . had the sacred name of Christ inscribed in three languages on three pillars which had been raised there in the ages of idolatry, in commemoration of some transaction of pagan rites." Similarly, the pillar stone of Kilnasaggart is believed to have been a heathen stone Christianised, and Reinach details several menhirs in France once heathen but now Christianised with the sign of the Cross. Again some legends of the Saints record that stones were sometimes blessed by saints, which is only a diplomatic way of saying that stone-worship was incorporated into early Christian ritual.

68. This policy has lasted down to the present day. Mr. T. W. Rolleston, in his "Myths and Legends of the Celtic Race" (p. 66), first published in 1911, gives a drawing "lately made on the spot by Mr. Arthur Bell," which "shows this very act of stone-worship still in full force in Brittany, and shows the symbols and the sacerdotal organisation of Christianity pressed into the service of this immemorial paganism." According to Mr. Bell, "the clergy take part in these performances with much reluctance, but are compelled to do so by the force of public opinion."

69. The finger of the Church is distinctly traceable in the fate of the pagan gods of stone. Occasionally we find

the stone-god turned into a fairy, and the names "Fairy Stone" and "Stone of the Fruitful Fairy" given to boulders near Clonmacnoise and in County Galway respectively seem to point to the heathen origin of these stones.

70. The giants who still in fancy roam our Western Shires are but the ghosts of the once mighty stone gods. There is scarcely a pile of rocks in the West where the old gods have not left their impress. In Cornwall, at Tol-Pedden, we have the Giant's Chair; at Carn Boscawen, the Giant's Pulpit; at Street-an-Noan, near Penzance, the Giant's Foot, now Christianised into the Devil's Hoof. At Lamorna we find the Giant's Cave; on Gulval Carn, a Giant's Mark; on Carn Brea, a Giant's Hand; at Looe, the Giant's Hedge; and at St. Agnes, the work of the Giant Bolster.

71. According to Cornish folk-lore, Cormelian, a giantess, in defiance of the instructions of her husband, Cormoran, carried a greenstone instead of a white one in her apron for the building of St. Michael's Mount. Her apron-string broke, and the greenstone fell to the ground, where it can still be seen on the clay slate rocks near St. Michael's Mount. In mediæval times a pilgrimage chapel was built on this greenstone rock, called to this day "Chapel Rock," an interesting instance of a Christian edifice built above a presumably heathen sacred stone.

72. However, the gods did not always escape so lightly as to be merely turned into giants. Sometimes they received a thoroughly Christian damnation and were metamorphosed into devils. So we find stones named the Devil's Whetstone in North Cornwall, the Devil's Arrows in Yorkshire, and the Devil's Quoits in Oxfordshire. In Wales we meet with the Devil's Apronful of Stones in Llanddewi Ystrad Enni and the Devil's Hearth in Nantmel, both in Radnorshire, while Pembrokeshire introduces us to the Devil's Quoits in Stackpole Warren, and to another Devil's Quoits in St. Petroc's, which, according to Fenton, met annually "to dance the hay at a place called Sais's (the Saxon's) Ford; and then, the dance over, resumed their stations." In Brittany there are 63 stones which are connected in name or in legend with the Devil. Of these, 54 are megaliths and 9 natural rocks. Sébillot rightly thinks that the names imposed on these megaliths are efforts on the part of the Church to destroy a heathen cult. In many legends connected with these stones the Devil fights with a

Christian saint, a folk-memory of the contest between heathenism and Christianity.

73. Having found some stone-gods turned into giants, devils and fairies, it will not surprise us to discover evidence of stone-worship in the lives of the Saints. To man of old, magic and religion were akin, so stones have in legend the magic property of being able to float. St. Declan's forgotten bell floated after him on a stone; St. Patrick's leper voyaged



[Mrs. M. O. Boyd, delt.]

Fig. 27.

ST. PIRAN ON HIS MILLSTONE.

from Britain to Ireland on the Saint's portable altar. Floating stones are mentioned by Adamnan in his *Life of Columba*, also by Tinmouth in his *vita* of St. Justinanus, while the Book of Leinster narrates that four saints crossed the ocean on a flagstone. The legend of how St. Piran floated on a millstone from Ireland to Cornwall is well known (Fig. 27). Strange to say there is a similar tradition of floating stones in the Pacific. The founders of Ponape, in the Caroline Islands, came from Yap on floating stones. But, perhaps, not so strange after all. The tradition

common to Celtic lands and to the Pacific may be a legacy of the "Children of the Sun."

74. The Breton St. Méen may well have been originally a stone god. Dr. Largillière says that many places in Brittany are called after St. Méen, whose cult was very popular as a saint of healing. *Méen* could well be a French form of the Breton *Mean*, "stone," and we have already had examples of stones endowed with healing powers. Stone-worship was conducted in groves, and in the Forest of Brecilien, where St. Méen is said to have founded his monastery, there is still a heathen stone. The Rev. S. Baring Gould, Mr. W. C. Borlase

and others regard St. Méen and St. Mevanus (a cousin of St. Samson, and a historic person) as one and the same. It would seem safer to regard St. Méen as a Christianisation of *Mean*, "stone," (perhaps the name of a stone god), and to say that the historic St. Mevanus has, owing to a similarity of name, attracted to himself some of the attributes of this stone god.

75. Someone has said that the cult of the stone commenced with the menhir and ended with the Venus of Milo. But the cult is not dead yet. Wakeman states that the menhir or gallaun is still considered by many native Irish as something weird which had better be "let alone"—a faint memory of a not altogether forgotten pagan creed. Sébillot says that in Brittany many peasants are still afraid to pass certain stones without bowing or removing the hat—evidence of the hereditary fear of the once sacred stone.

The profusion of white, rounded pebbles found in ancient graves points to the former sanctity of these stones. Wood-Martin tells us that a Manx fisherman thinks it unlucky to have a white stone in his boat, and that an unlucky fisherman is nicknamed *Clagh Vane*, "White Stone." The idea of luck implies something magical in the stone, and magic and primitive religion were closely akin. So the connection of stones with an erst-time heathen cult exists in reality to-day, but the connection is all but forgotten.

76. The belief in healing stones would seem to be as everlasting as the stones themselves. Mary Queen of Scots bequeathed to her brother-in-law, Henry II. of France, "two rare stones valuable for the health."

Captain William Thomas, of Perranporth, tells me that he knew an old Cornish woman named Fanny Francis who had a remarkable cure for a bad leg—to rub it in "essence of thunder." This precious liquid was obtained by boiling a "thunderbolt" (apparently a neolithic implement) in a saucepan for twenty minutes. The owner of the "thunderbolt" was a miner at Pool who "lent it out" at 3d. a time! The Captain adds: "I knew the woman well and have heard her prescribe."

Even to-day there is many a rounded pebble surreptitiously carried in the trouser pocket as an infallible specific against rheumatism.

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